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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose for evaluating novice teachers is to improve their performance. The paper presents a model for assessing and assisting novice teachers to have a broad variety of professional learning experiences, to acquire a wide repertoire of teaching competencies and skills, and to gain familiarity with the language and norms governing both professional and social interaction among the members of the teaching profession. The types of support are: (1) providing mentors/supporting teachers; (2) establishing a network of collegiality; (3) establishing self and/or peer evaluation programs; (4) promoting reflective practice; and (5) using a portfolio system of documentation. Although beginning teachers might be well-prepared in content and theory, they still have much to learn about putting their knowledge to work. With the support and assistance provided by this model, enthusiastic novices could improve their teaching competencies in a relatively short period of time. (Contains 18 references.) (ND)

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ASSESSING AND ASSISTING NOVICE TEACHERS: A FRAMEWORK FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

It has become commonplace to characterize that there are multiple purposes for evaluation of teachers that can and need to be served. These purposes are generally divided into two major areas: summative and formative evaluations. Summative evaluation is a product evaluation, in which value is placed on teachers' performance or whatever product is being evaluated. The result of this evaluation can be used in a decision-making process for certification, contract renewal or assignment to a career ladder, or an award of incentive pay.

Formative evaluation, in contrast, is a process evaluation. It provides on-going information to teachers, so they can make appropriate adjustment; soon after they learn from what has happened. Unlike summative evaluation which is generally used to make a differentiation among teachers and to weed out bad teachers, formative evaluation is used to allow for feedback to the teachers, and focus on the professional growth of the individual teacher.

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Citing a research-based work by Howsam et. al (1976), Gomez (1990) has noted that, in the USA, a great number of beginning teachers function in a professional desert, abandoned by the institutions where they received their preservice education and neglected by overburdened school personnel. Tellez (1992) and Haefele (1992) suggest that the prevailing practice in the field of evaluation of teachers does not differentiate novice teachers who are new to the teaching profession from those veteran teachers who have been in the profession for a number of years. This practice is not fair to the novice teachers considering their lack of familiarity with the reality of classroom life, professional as well as social norms governing the members of the teaching profession, and other instruction-related factors external to the novice teachers.

This article will (1) discuss the nature of teaching and teaching competencies, (2) elaborate on characteristics of novice teachers and the problems they generally have, and (3) propose a model for assessing and assisting novice teachers in order to ease their transition from their status as students to that of teachers, and enhance their further development in their teaching profession.

TEACHING PROFESSION AND TEACHING COMPETENCIES

As has happened in other professions, teaching profession has been concerned with basic issues such as the identification of effective practice, the communication of that exemplary practice to novices, and then the novices' adoption of those practices in their own professional behavior (Gorrell & Capron, 1991). This effort is crucial because one of the hallmark of any profession is the ability of its members to define and enforce standards of competent performance (Wildman et al., 1992)

In the spirit of this professional demand, educational researchers have conducted extensive empirical studies resulting in numerous models of effective schools and good teaching (Zahoric, 1986)

It is generally accepted that there are many ways of conceptualizing good teaching. For example, synthesizing a body of research on teaching, John Zahoric (1986) identified six different conceptions of good teaching: (a) doing what effective teachers do, (b) following a tested model of good teaching, (c) operationalizing learning principles, (d) implementing a theoretical model of good teaching, (e) implementing a philosophical model of good teaching, and (f) performing in resourceful, creative ways. Each

conception is legitimate in its own right, and they are not compatible with each other.

In addition to differing theoretical orientations, the level of teachers' teaching experience can also result in different conceptions of teaching . For instance, a comparative study on teaching views and prototypes of novice, advanced beginner and expert teachers conducted by Bents and Gardner (1992) has indicated, among other things, that there is an evident developmental progression in teaching orientations of each group of the teachers, moving from teacher-centeredness (typically adopted by novice), to child-centeredness (by advanced beginners), and then "interrelatedness" (as typically practiced by the expert teachers).

The variability of teaching conceptions makes it difficult to identify universal teaching skills because those skills emerge from one's conception of good teaching. This is not to say that there is no agreement among experts on essential teaching skills which are shared by good teachers across levels, subject matters, and philosophical strands. For example, Zahoric (1986) has argued that all teachers ought to be able to give lucid explanations; they should be able to structure knowledge in a way that promotes understanding; they ought to be able to manage

a group of learners. D'Costa (1993), citing the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1989), has specified five core propositions as to what teachers should know and be able to do, as the following:

(1) be committed to students and their learning;

(2) know the subjects they teach and how to teach thosesubjects to students;

(3) manage and monitor students' learning;

(4) think systematically about their teaching and learn from experience;

(5) be members of learning communities.

Along the same line, Hollins (1993) has identified seven essential teaching competencies: (1) communicating with diverse learners, (2) knowing subject and students, (3) reflective teaching, (4) identifying resources, (5) creating supportive context, (6) developing interpersonal relationship, and (7) promoting learner performance.

The variability of conceptions of good teaching suggests multiple realities surrounding teaching practitioners, and the developmental nature of the acquisition of teaching competencies.

BEGINNING TEACHERS: THEIR PROBLEMS AND POTENTIALS

Judging from the way the beginning teachers in the USA have so far been evaluated, it seems that the assumption has been that the teaching-learning world of college from which the novice teachers are graduated is exactly the same as the reality of classroom to which the beginning teachers are assigned. This is an inaccurate, if not totally erroneous, assumption. The fact is that, according to Lawson (1992), becoming a teacher is not a simple transition from one role to another; it is a social process involving complex interactions between and among prospective and experienced teachers and their intricate social situations.

Researchers have noticed that beginning teachers face a considerable amount of problems in initial years of their classroom life as teachers . For instance, Schaffer et. al (1992) have characterized novice teachers entry into classroom life as involving reality shock and unanticipated loneliness of the workplace. Along the same line, citing a number of empirical studies (e.g. by Ryan et al., 1980; Veenman, 1984; Elias et al., 1980), Varah et al. (1986) noted several highest-ranking areas of difficulties generally faced by novice teachers, including personal-life adjustment, the strains of daily interactions, disciplining students, motivating students, dealing with individual

differences, assessing students, dealing with heavy teaching loads and insufficient preparation time, developing relationships with colleagues, planning lessons, preparing for the school day, finding and using appropriate instructional materials, evaluating students work, and coping with sense of isolation and insecurity.

In terms of instruction-related behaviors, Linda Valli (1992) identifies four knotty problems that are typically faced by beginning teachers: imitation, isolation, transfer, and technique.

o **Problem of Imitation**

Pressured by their insecurity about their own preparedness for the teaching job, beginning teachers tend to adopt a safe strategy, namely, by mimicking instructional behaviors of their cooperating teachers. According to Valli's (1992) observation, in most cases, the novice teachers do not understand the reasons behind the instructional actions they imitate and, in consequence, they use those behaviors in inappropriate ways.

If the beginning teachers continue blindly imitating their cooperating teachers, they will have difficulty teaching on their own because they have not developed a consistent, internalized philosophy of instruction, have not found a style which suits them and cannot adapt their behavior to new and different

situations.

o **Problem of Isolation**

Being new comers in the teaching profession, and spending most of their time taking care of and interacting with distantly-younger learners, novice teachers generally face a problem of isolation--feeling cut off from peers, feeling isolated within their new environment where they know few teachers and not always incorporated into the social organization of the school.

o **Problem of Transfer**

Eugene Schaffer et. al (1992) have described novice teachers situation as chaotic and unsupported that, in their teaching, most of them focus narrowly on controlling students behavior rather than fostering students learning.

Parallel to this observation, the literature suggests that beginning teachers often fail to use their knowledge in the real classroom context because they tend to fall back on childhood memories of teachers or become overly dependent on the mandated curriculum (Valli, 1992)

o **Problem of Technique**

Caught up in overwhelmingly uncertain situations, beginning teachers tend to strive for quick answers and a definite set of rules to follow to become good

teachers. This tendency would create further problems because it is not compatible with the nature of teaching, which is complex and situation specific.

In other words, their overwhelming concern about teaching techniques would lead the novice teachers to an overly narrow conception of teaching as a technical rule-following enterprise, detached from its broader normative basis.

While admittedly having lots of problems, novice teachers are not merely a bunch of bad news. According to some experts' observations (Glickman, 1981, cited in Valli, 1992), beginning teachers are generally highly committed to their job, and are willing to change their teaching behaviors when provided with clearly presented theory, demonstrations, and opportunities to practice, and with timely feedback.

TEACHING ASSESSMENT AND ASSISTANCE

Given the numerous problems the novice teachers are faced with, it is only fair if their performance is assessed in a different way than those of experienced teachers. In this case, commensurate with their status as new comers to the teaching profession, the assessment of novice teachers' performance should be diagnostic in nature, with primary purposes of documenting the present (entry-level) teaching

competencies and identifying problem areas for further remedy and improvement. In this way, the result of the assessment would provide useful feedback for further development of the new teachers.

According to Harris (1987), diagnostic evaluation methods are relatively powerful, and they offer opportunities for novice teachers and their more-experienced supporting colleagues to work in a collaborative, mutually supportive fashion to improve teaching.

As suggested in the preceding paragraphs, the primary purpose of the evaluation of teaching performance of novice teachers is to improve their performance. Instructional improvement processes are more important than its form and checklists (Thorson et. al, 1987). In addition, some other types of supports need also be provided so that the novice teachers can get a broad variety of professional learning experiences, acquire a wide repertoire of teaching competencies and skills and gain familiarity with the language and norms governing both professional as well as social interactions among the members of the teaching profession (Varah et. al, 1986; Tellez, 1992).

To ensure the achievement of the said objectives, the following supports need to be made available and established.

o **Provide mentors/supporting teachers.**

As indicated earlier, novice teachers are faced with multiple problems. Among the most pressing are day-to-day aspects of teaching: planning lessons, finding and using appropriate instructional materials, evaluating students' work, dealing with individual differences, disciplining students and motivating them to learn, etc.

Giving the necessary support is therefore in order. One possible form of support is mentoring. Mentor/supporting teachers could significantly assist the novice teachers by giving direct demonstrations--both process and product-- of planning and teaching some sections of the subject matter that the novice teachers are supposed to teach. Watching and observing a master teacher at work is a very powerful way of inducing a novice teacher to the profession because this demonstration gives a realistic picture of the professional demand that the novice teacher is entering.

o **Establish a network of collegiality.**

Research studies have suggested that beginning teachers, who are self-conscious of being watched and evaluated by their supervisor and/or hiring boss, tend

to feel reluctant to reveal their problems, worries, doubts and questions to their "senior" for fear of being considered incompetent. Given this unfortunate situation, establishing a collegiality network would be necessary.

Collegiality here is defined as "the establishment of a professional relationship for the purpose of service and accommodation through the mutual exchange of perceptions and expertise " and its goal is "to create a bond that enhances one's ability to become a professional." (Lemlech & Kaplan, 1990, p.14) Here, novice teachers, together with their emphatic and supporting colleagues, can share their concerns and problems, exchange experiences and mutually suggest alternative ways of fulfilling their professional needs.

o **Establish self and/or peer evaluation programs.**

From experience we learned that the word "evaluation" tends to trigger feeling of anxiety, especially to those who think that their job is being put on the line-- such as novice teachers. Research studies have well documented that this type of anxiety could hamper optimal performance.

To get rid of this debilitating effect of the assessment practice, a specially designed program might

be in order. In this case, I am proposing an alternative format: self and/or peer evaluation. According to McGreal (1983), this type of assessment format is the most acceptable one because it represents "the ultimate goal of any teacher evaluation program that seeks to promote better performance and to enhance professional status." (p.130)

o **Promote reflective practice.**

As suggested in the discussion on the problems of imitation, transfer and technique which are reportedly faced by the majority of novice teachers, it takes lots of critical analysis and reflective thoughts before a new comer could teach a class in appropriate and productive ways. It is therefore critical that we encourage the novice teachers to review, reconstruct, and critically analyze their own teaching performance and the performance of the classes they teach.

Only through this reflective process will the beginning teachers be able to apply educational principles and instructional techniques within a framework of their own experience, contextual factors, and social and philosophical values.

o **Establish a portfolio system of documentation**

As outlined in the preceding sections, the

complexity of teaching behaviors requires a comprehensive, multi-dimensional but integrated system of assessment that is sensitive to the multiple attributes of an effective teacher. To address this multi-layer evaluation needs, I am proposing the use of a documentation system that can capture both the processes as well as products of teaching acts-- the portfolio assessment.

According to Gellman (1992/93), portfolios can document the unfolding of teaching and learning over time as well as provide the novice etachers the opportunities to engage in the analysis of what they have done. The proposed portfolio should contain, at the very least, (1) videotapes of classroom instruction, (2) artifacts produced by the novice teacher: e.g., materials used in instruction, reflective essays on the novice-prepared lessons and on students' work, (3) attestation of the teaching accomplishment from the novice's fellow teaching staff (peers), students, and mentor teachers and supervisors; and (4) students' artifacts: e.g. students' portfolios, projects, essays, and other work samples.

ENDNOTES

From the foregoing discussion it is evident that beginning teachers, although they might be well-

prepared in content and theory, still have much to learn about putting their knowledge into work.

Given the situation, and also considering the fact that it is very unlikely that the hiring school would dismiss the novice teachers for possible lack of teaching competencies (Haefele, 1992), it seems reasonable to suggest that some support and assistance be made available and rendered to the in-coming beginning teachers. All the support should be geared towards the provisions for acquiring additional knowledge and instructional skills, opportunities for developing attitudes that would likely foster effective performance, and assistance in becoming integrated into the community of learning professional educators.

With this massive support and assistance, it is very likely that, in a relatively short period of time, the enthusiastic novices would be an asset to the teaching force they are in.

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